

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) A drying method for drying a coating layer which is formed by coating a moving web with a coating solution containing organic solvent, comprising steps of:

transporting said web upwardly with ~~60°-90°~~ an inclination to a horizontal direction immediately after the coating;

inclining with one or larger number of guide rollers the upward transporting of said web from said ~~60°-90°~~ inclination toward a horizontal direction ~~gradually~~; and

drying said coating layer with a drying device having a casing in which said web enters at said ~~60°-90°~~ inclination,

wherein said inclination is defined by the guide rollers having transport angle θ_1 at an entrance of the drying apparatus, θ_2 in a casing of the drying apparatus and θ_3 at an exit of the drying apparatus, and

$$\underline{60^0 \leq \theta_3 \leq \theta_2 \leq \theta_1 \leq 90^0, \theta_3 < \theta_1.}$$

2. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein said one or larger number of guide rollers are disposed within said drying device.

3. (currently amended) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein said coating surface is positioned ~~upside~~ on an upper surface of said web.

4. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein a velocity of said wind inside said drying device is less than 0.1 m/s when the transport of said web is stopped.

5. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein said coating layer is further dried by a heat-drying means disposed downstream from said drying device.

6. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein an interval between a coating position and a first guide roller of said guide rollers disposed closest to said coating position, and being within said drying device, is less than 2m from said coating position.

7. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 6, wherein other guide rollers disposed downstream from said first guide roller are disposed with at most a 2m interval.

8. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein an entrance of said drying device is disposed within 0.7m from a coating position.

9. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein at least one device for condensing and recovering said organic solvent in said coating solution on said coating surface is at a transporting position of said web within said drying device.

10. (currently amended) The drying method claimed in claim 9, wherein a ~~plate-shaped~~ plate member is used for said device for condensing and recovering.

11. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 9, wherein each said device for condensing and recovering is disposed in a space formed by partitioning an inside of said drying device with said guide rollers.

12. (currently amended) A drying method claimed in claim 10, wherein said ~~plate-shaped~~ plate member is provided for a cooling apparatus, and a temperature of said plate-shaped member is adjustable with employment of said cooling apparatus.

13. (currently amended) The drying method claimed in claim 10, wherein a flow path in which said condensed organic solvent flows is provided on a surface of said ~~plate-shaped~~ plate member.

14. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein side plates are disposed on two sides of said drying device, or said sides are tightly closed so as to prevent said solvent vapor from said coating layer from flowing out of said drying device.

15. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein a content of said organic solvent in said coating solution is at least 50% by mass.

16. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein said drying device dries at least 70% by mass of said organic solvent contained in said coating solution.

17. (currently amended) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein ~~there is~~ a heating device ~~in a side of~~ is positioned beside a non-coating surface ~~[[of]]~~ at a transport position of said web within said drying device.

18. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein a thickness of said coating layer is at most 50 μm prior to drying.

19. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein an extrusion die coater is used to apply said coating solution on said web supported by a back-up roller.

20. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein at least a wire bar coater or a gravure coater is used to apply said coating solution on said web.

21-41. (canceled)

42. (currently amended) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein ~~the inclination is 75° - 89°~~ $75^{\circ} \leq \theta_3 \leq \theta_2 \leq \theta_1 \leq 89^{\circ}$.

43. (currently amended) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein ~~the inclination is 75° - 88°~~ $75^{\circ} \leq \theta_3 \leq \theta_2 \leq \theta_1 \leq 88^{\circ}$.

44-46. (canceled)